

to her 'moral insanity' (p.120). She resigned from her teaching position and moved to New Zealand. Judicial records in New Zealand must be better than those from colonial Victoria, for the book's focus turns to Bock's swindles, her court appearances and numerous spells in jail. Again, the tedium of reading about every occurrence is overwhelming. It is a pity that this book lacks contextual details that might allow us to understand not only how Bock managed to pull off her frauds (the use of IOUs seems to have been commonplace), but also their relative scale: what did £41 buy in 1909?

Finally, in the seventh chapter of a nine chapter book, Bock appears as Percy Carol Redwood and the stage is set for her most notorious swindle. Although this is the first case where Bock is known to have impersonated a man, questions about why she might have dressed in men's clothing do not cloud the two chapters devoted to the Redwood case. The final chapter details Bock's post-Redwood life, when she moved to the New Plymouth area, married a man and spent a number of years out of court before returning to her scamming ways.

For those wondering what all of this means, and who the *real* Amy Bock was, the brief Epilogue poses the question 'Mad or Bad?' and notes that over the years Bock has been explained away by her 'lunatic inheritance', that at times her legal defence argued that she suffered from kleptomania, that more recent analysis has suggested she was a 'pathological liar', and that there have been various attempts to 'claim' Bock as a lesbian. To the extent that Coleman stops asking questions and attempts to offer some answers, she seems to reject the lesbian claim, have sympathy with the pathological liar interpretation, and find the evidence in support of kleptomania partial at best. In the end, Coleman is happiest to label Bock a 'confidence artist', call her a 'consummate performer and entertainer' and conclude that she 'was, and remains, a bit of a hard case' (p.327).

Amy Bock swindled and lied her way through life. She acquired goods under false pretences from small-business people and those she befriended. In the current climate we might refer to people like Miss Henderson, the 'hard-working young woman' who lent Percy Redwood her life savings of £41 (p.199), as 'mum and dad investors'. Few of us would regard Hanover Finance's Mark Hotchin 'a bit of a hard case', even if he donned a wedding dress and married Eric Watson. It is remarkable that this is almost the sole authorial conclusion of *Mad or Bad?*

After reading *Mad or Bad?* I am none the wiser as to who the *real* Amy Bock was. But then, Coleman said she wanted to ask the question; she did not say she wanted to answer it. The author has provided some of the detail behind Bock's life of false pretences and fraud — too much in the case of her time as a school teacher; not enough in terms of her relationships with those on whom she allegedly spent her ill-gotten gains. But in many ways, Coleman achieves what she sets out to do. It is a pity her aims were not more ambitious.

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No Fretful Sleeper: A Life of Bill Pearson. By Paul Millar. Auckland University Press, Auckland, 2010. 380pp. NZ price: \$59.99. ISBN 978-1-86940-419-2.

FEW ACCOUNTS OF NEW ZEALAND's cultural ethos have resonated quite so strongly as Bill Pearson's 'Fretful Sleepers'. Published in *Landfall* in 1952 and for a second time in 1974, Pearson's essay exposed what he felt to be the reality for 'any man deemed to be different' — a marginalization that was as much a 'denial of life itself' as an embodiment

of New Zealand's reaction to the 'menace' of diversity. For all its enduring significance, though, the man behind the work has remained largely in the background. Paul Millar's account of Pearson's life is therefore a timely rehabilitation of both man and writer, and in some ways completes a 'coming out' that Pearson had himself undertaken near the end of the twentieth century (Pearson passed away in 2002). Retiring from an existence that might have produced a more pervasive public persona, Pearson had largely remained suspicious of New Zealand's attitude towards homosexuality, living a life that was for the most part deeply private and carefully self-effacing.

In this sense Paul Millar is to Bill Pearson what Michael King was to Frank Sargeson. These biographies indicate that neither literary man lived entirely closeted lives. Their personal ambivalence and fear of reprisal, however, meant that their own written life narratives were often — and sometimes necessarily — circumspect. And both men struggled to fully escape the spectre of their respective pasts during their lifetimes. As with King's *Frank Sargeson: A Life*, Millar's *No Fretful Sleeper* is sensitive to Pearson's experience, not only as an artist, but also as a homosexual. Millar suggests that Pearson's status as 'other' is key to understanding his very particular life trajectory. Millar's revisions give important insight into one man's experience of 'preliberation New Zealand' (normally cited as the years prior to 1972) and give a surprisingly detailed account of Pearson's development, both professionally and personally. His account is carefully considered and always mediated by the voice and perspective of his subject.

Pearson was ultimately one of a number of homosexual literary men who migrated to Europe before 1972, in this case to undertake a PhD at King's College London in 1949. Millar's account, however, is most compelling for the light it sheds on the ways that one man negotiated New Zealand spaces and social regimes, particularly in the years before the outbreak of the Second World War (the period immediately prior to the emergence of modern 'gay' identities here and overseas). Born in Greymouth in 1922, Pearson's early life was an emphatically provincial one. As Millar suggests, his social and domestic experience had a profound impact on the young New Zealander. Pearson's sense of difference coalesced, Millar writes, at his earliest point of consciousness. While mateship (largely platonic and male) gave some respite, Pearson's frustration at the dominant moral order is palpable. The quintessential 'man alone', he was an outsider from the outset; a position that invariably informed his creative output and views of social justice.

Millar successfully mines a number of sources in constructing his account of the famously reserved literary icon. Not surprisingly, Millar's own interviews with the writer yield the most fruitful results, and *No Fretful Sleeper* certainly reads with an uncanny sense of Pearson's own voice. Pearson's careful self-censorship (a number of letters were destroyed at his request) meant that what might otherwise have been valuable historical sources were lost to his biographer. Pearson's oral testimony largely addresses these gaps in the puzzle, giving a pleasant counterpoint to Millar's own careful analysis of surviving letters and documents. Millar's skill as a literary specialist also animates excerpts from Pearson's considerable body of creative material (including his only novel, 1963's *Coal Flat*). Most of Pearson's writings, as Millar notes, are 'firmly anchored in experience'. They are broadly autobiographical and — fearing that this connection might have unfortunate consequences — explain, in part, why Pearson's creative productions curtailed as his academic reputation acquired greater force.

Pearson's life is, of course, a very singular one. Millar gives a sophisticated view of a man who fought to reconcile his own sexual nature in a century largely hostile to difference of all kinds. Yet it is perhaps this focus (an emphasis on the particular at the expense of wider social patternings) that undermines the work's historical precision. Millar's view of New Zealand's sexual past is largely that of his subject's: a space that is puritanical and aggressively heteronormative. Millar does speak of the ability of men like Pearson to 'pass' in conventional circles. He also notes how Pearson located pockets of understanding

amongst heterosexual women and other (usually Bohemian) sympathisers — the poet James K. Baxter among them. For the most part, however, ‘preliberation’ seems to presume a homosexuality that was, in Millar’s estimation at least, largely covert and unsatisfying. ‘Mainstream’ and ‘homosexual’ cultures remain diametrically opposed to one another, and these monoliths elide any question of the ambivalence or interplay that must exist within any regime of power.

While Millar’s account is a literary biography and not an academic history *per se*, his evocation of period and place is conspicuous for its disconnection from much local and international historiography. Reflecting his own disciplinary background, perhaps, Millar makes better use of literary-historical works — Peter Wells and Rex Pilgrim’s *Best Mates*, for example — but largely ignores the now burgeoning field of the history of sexuality, especially Chris Brickell’s *Mates and Lovers*. This new wave of research has reconsidered prior conceptions of New Zealand’s sexual past and emphasized the range of possibilities open to individuals as they sought social and sexual contact in the years before 1972. While it may be tempting to see Pearson as the ‘twentieth-century New Zealand everyman’, his own experience cannot be taken as representative of all preliberation lives. Although it is fair to say that Pearson’s life was sometimes far from positive, the conventions of biographical writing mean that our view of this past is only ever glimpsed through Pearson’s very particular perspective. Looking broadly at both period and place may have allowed Millar to contextualize this process more thoroughly, locating Pearson less in isolation and more firmly within the broader community of people to which he belonged.

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Towards a Promised Land: On the Life and Art of Colin McCahon. By Gordon H. Brown. Auckland University Press, Auckland, 2010. 216pp. NZ price: \$79.99. ISBN 978 1 86940 452 9.

GORDON BROWN MET COLIN McCAHON in 1952 and they became close lifelong friends. Over the years they were also work colleagues: Brown curated exhibitions of McCahon’s art, and wrote a book and essays on it. And the two discussed works in progress. In other words, Brown has an ‘insider’s’ knowledge of the art and career of this painter, the most celebrated in New Zealand’s art history. Brown’s ‘couldn’t-be-better-informed’ perspective, then, is unique among the many writers who have engaged with the ‘Master’s’ oeuvre.

Towards a Promised Land (a play on the title of a very well-known 1948 McCahon painting) is the product of many years looking at, as well as thinking, talking and writing about, his work. A succinct introduction frames 16 chapters, ten of which are revised versions of previously published pieces of varying lengths, one of just two pages.

The book is an anthology, not a comprehensive survey. It addresses a selection of aspects of the artist’s work and career — McCahon and theatre, McCahon and Woollaston (another pioneering New Zealand modernist), for example — as well as major series of paintings and individual works. Brown gives particular emphasis to the religious and biblical dimensions of McCahon’s art, including his involvement with Christianity. Having studied theology, the author is probably better equipped to do this than any other writer on McCahon. He also tactfully addresses matters that most others have avoided, and the consequences of which they have perhaps even denied. Brown does not shy away from the destructiveness of McCahon’s heavy drinking, his increasingly severe memory loss from the late 1970s, and his health decline and brain damage. He implies that all this must have affected the quality of McCahon’s painting.